

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9221

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: XB, XP, UR, MPOL, RP

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF ASIAN/PACIFIC REGION PERCEPTIONS OF
THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC
(NIAM 40/11-1-76)

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRESIDENT MARCOS AND A FEW KEY FIGURES
WITHIN THE PHILIPPINE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT ARE CONSCIOUS
OF GROWING SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN PACIFIC, AND THERE
IS A GROWING AWARENESS AMONG FILIPINO ELITES OF SOVIET
NAVAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REGION DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS.
THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT LIMITED HIGH-LEVEL AWARENESS
OF INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL STRENGTH HAS AS YET SIGNIFICANTLY
AFFECTED GOP ATTITUDES, CONCERNS OR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT
SOVIET UNION, REGIONAL BALANCE OF POWER, BASE ISSUES OR
SIZE OF NATIONAL ARMED FORCES. GOP DESIRE TO MAINTAIN
SMOOTH RELATIONS WITH BOTH US AND PRC, AS WELL AS WITH
ASEAN COUNTRIES, WILL EXERT DETERMINING INFLUENCE ON
SCOPE AND COURSE OF GOP'S RELATIONS WITH USSR. THIS
MESSAGE COMMENTS ON GENERAL GOP ATTITUDES TOWARD SOVIET
UNION AND ADDRESSES SPECIFIC QUESTIONS POSED PARA 3
REFTEL. END SUMMARY.

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1. GOP NORMALIZED RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION ONLY IN JUNE 1976 AND IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THERE IS NO GENERAL AWARENESS OF SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN THE PACIFIC AREA OVER LAST HALF DECADE. PRESIDENT MARCOS, HOWEVER, AND A FEW KEY DEFENSE ADVISERS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY CONCOUS OF GROWING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE. MARCOS HAS SPOKEN OF NEED FOR "QUADRILATERAL POWER BALANCE" IN AREA (US/USSR/PRC/JAPAN) BUT THERE IS NO RPT NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT MARCOS WOULD WELCOME OR BE COMFORTABLE WITH A PERMANENT SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE REGION. DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO MOSCOW, MARCOS SUCCESSFULLY RESISTED (A) SOVIET PRESSURE TO ENDORSE ITS ASIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY PROPOSAL, (B) EFFORTS TO HAVE HIM ACCEPT SOVIET ARMS, AND (C) REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR BASING SOVIET FISHING VESSELS IN PHILIPPINE PORTS AND PERMITTING AEROFLOT COMMERCIAL OPERATING RIGHTS IN MANILA, COMBINATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT SOVIET MARITIME FLEET TO BE MORE OR LESS PERMANENTLY DEPLOYED IN THE AREA (SEE MANILA 11805). RECENTLY WHEN A SOVIET RESEARCH VESSEL (MENDELEYEV) OPERATING UNDER UNESCO AUSPICES, SOUGHT PERMISSION TO DOCK IN MANILA, REQUEST WAS REJECTED BY SECDEF ENRILE REPORTEDLY AFTER CONSULTING MARCOS (SEE MANILA 10125). FOREGOING SUGGESTS THAT DESPITE NORMALIZATION, THE PRESIDENT DOES NOT TRUST THE SOVIET UNION AND IS SUSPICIOUS OF SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE REGION. SOVIETS ARE AWARE OF THIS DISTRUST. AS SOVIET FAR EASTERN EXPERT MIKHAIL KAPITSA NOTED PERCEPTIVELY IN FEBRUARY WHEN COMMENTING ON TIME NORMALIZATION WITH PHILIPPINES REQUIRED, "THEY (FILIPINOS) SEEM TO BE AFRAID OF US." (MOSCOW 1568). AN ADDITIONAL LIMITING FACTOR IN GOP/USSR RELATIONSHIP IS ATTITUDE OF PRC. SINCE GOP "TILTED" TOWARD PRC BY ABANDONING SIMULTANEOUS NORMALIZATION AND ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH PRC IN 1975 A YEAR BEFORE USSR, PRC CLEARLY HAS PRIMACY OVER USSR IN TERMS OF GOP INTERESTS. INEVITABLY, THIS WILL CONSTRAIN SCOPE AND INTENSITY OF USSR/GOP RELATIONS.

2. WITHIN THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT AND MILITARY
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THERE IS PERVASIVE SKEPTICISM ABOUT SOVIET INTENTIONS, WHICH IS PARTIALLY DUE TO SOMEWHAT ANACHRONISTIC ADHERENCE TO COLD WAR VIEWS OF SOVIET UNION. SKEPTICISM AND APPREHENSION, HOWEVER, ARE RATHER UNFOCUSED. EVEN AMONG RANKING MILITARY FIGURES THERE IS DEARTH OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EXACTLY WHAT SOVIETS ARE DOING IN AREA. INVARIABLY, NAVAL ATTACHE TAKES INITIATIVE IN INFORMING PHILIPPINE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT OF PRE-

SENCE OF SOVIET SHIPS IN AREA, SIGHTINGS OF SOVIET SUBMARINES, AND SURFACE SHIPS IN THE PHILIPPINE SEA, ETC. PHILIPPINE NAVAL RARELY HAS SOUGHT CLEARER PICTURE OF EXACTLY WHAT SOVIETS ARE UP TO IN AREA. THIS IS PERHAPS INEVITABLE FUNCTION OF PHILIPPINES' LACK OF BLUE WATER NAVY AND COMPLETE RELIANCE ON US DEFENSE COMMITMENT FOR STRATEGIC DEFENSE. IT IS PROBABLE GOP AWARENESS OF SOVIET NAVAL POTENTIAL AND ACTIVITIES WILL INCREASE, BUT AT THIS JUNCTURE THIS SEEMS TO BE A LONG-TERM PRESPECT. INDONESIA'S CONTINUING AND INCREASING CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY IN REGION SHOULD ENHANCE GOP'S OWN PERCEPTION OF THIS ACTIVITY. FOR MORE GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF USSR/GOP RELATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT, SEE MANILA 8336 AND INR REPORT 533 OF JULY 23, 1976.

3. FOLLOWING COMMENTS ARE KEYED TO PARA 3 (A) AND (B) REFTEL: (A) AWARENESS OF SOVIET DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PACIFIC OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS -- AS INDICATED ABOVE, AWARENESS OF THESE ACTIVITIES IS CONFINED PRIMARILY TO HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT. IN CASE OF LATTER, HOWEVER, AWARENESS SEEMS SOMEWHAT DIFFUSE. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THERE HAVE

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BEEN SIGNS AWARENESS IS GROWING AMONG MEDIA. A COLUMN BY NESTOR MATA IN THE AUG 15 "DAILY EXPRESS" IS AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE: "JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND, AND OF COURSE, THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS, ALL BELIEVE THAT ONLY THE UNITED STATES CAN PROVIDE A PERFECT COUNTERFOIL TO THE GROWING SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE AREA AND TO THE UNCERTAIN CHINESE LOYALTIES WHICH MAY GO ONE WAY OR THE OTHER." "BULLETIN TODAY'S" JESUS BIGORNIA (BROTHER OF ASSISTANT PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SPOKESMAN) RECENTLY HAS CARRIED SMALL ITEMS ABOUT NECESSITY OF CLOSELY MONITORING INCREASING SOVIET ACTIVITIES WITHIN COUNTRY AND REGION. BIGORNIA APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN FED THESE ITEMS BY GOP DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT. "BULLETIN'S" POL BATALLA HAS ALSO HAD SEVERAL RECENT PIECES ON GROWING SOVIET NAVAL STRENGTH IN AREA.

4. EFFECT OF PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENTS ON ATTITUDES, CONCERNS OR PERCEPTIONS OF:

(1) SOVIET UNION ITSELF--GOP EXPERIENCE WITH
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SOVIET UNION IS MINIMAL. PRESIDENT MARCOS DOES NOT TRUST SOVIET LEADERSHIP. GOP MILITARY IS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT SOVIET EMBASSY IS TO BE ESTABLISHED. PHILIPPINE BUSINESS COMMUNITY DOES NOT BELIEVE SOVIET UNION OFFERS MAJOR MARKET FOR PHILIPPINE PRODUCTS AND FINDS SOVIET ECONOMIC SYSTEM DISTASTEFUL. PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH OVER LAST DECADE SHOW FILIPINOS HAVE LOW ESTEEM FOR SOVIETS. MARCOS' CLOSEST POLITICAL CONFIDENT, GOVERNOR BENJAMIN (KOKOY) ROMUALDEZ TOLD DEPTOFFS IN JUNE, ONLY HALF FACETIOUSLY, THAT FILIPINOS' EXPOSURE TO SOVIETS DURING MARCOS' STATE VISIT WOULD MAKE THEM APPRECIATE US MORE. THESE NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS, HOWEVER, ARE INDEPENDENT OF AWARENESS OF GROWING SOVIET NAVAL POWER.

(2) THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE AREA--PRESIDENT MARCOS MAINTAINS THAT SOVIET UNION MUST CONTRIBUTE TO "QUADRILATERAL POWER BALANCE" IN THE AREA, BUT IT IS DOUBTFUL HE BELIEVES HIS OWN RHETORIC. CLEARLY, MARCOS IS NOT ANXIOUS FOR INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE REGION. IN VIEW GOP CONCERN OVER INTENTIONS OF VIETNAM, ESPECIALLY IN SPRATLY AREA, MARCOS MUST FIND IT HARD TO VISUALIZE ANY CONFRONTA-

TIONAL SITUATION IN WHICH SOVIET NAVAL FORCES WOULD NOT BE ON SIDE OF SRV.

(3) THE DIRECTION REGIONAL EFFORTS WOULD TAKE--
MARCOS FAVORS STRONG ASEAN. SRV'S INITIAL HOSTILITY TO ASEAN AND SOVIETS' REFUSAL TO ENDORSE ASEAN ARE REASONS FOR GOP TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT SOVIET INTENTIONS.

(4) INDIAN OCEAN ISSUES--THE GOP HAS ADOPTED NO FORMAL POSITION ON US OR USSR NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. IT SUBSCRIBES TO ASEAN'S RATHER NEBULOUS ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY PROPOSAL.

(5) BASE, ALLIANCE AND UNCLEAR ISSUES--THESE ISSUES ARE LARGELY SUI GENERIS. GOP WILL NOT PERMIT ITS EMBRYONIC RELATIONSHIP WITH SOVIET UNION OR INDEED ANY
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OTHER STATE TO UNDULY INFLUENCE BILATERAL ISSUES WITH US ALTHOUGH FILIPINO EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY MORE CLOSELY WITH THIRD WORLD HAVE SOMEWHAT AFFECTED BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH US. IT IS IMPROBABLE GOP WOULD ATTEMPT PURSUE COURSE ADOPTED EARLIER BY OTHER THIRD WORLD NATIONS AND SOMEHOW ATTEMPT PLAY OFF US AGAINST USSR. CURRENT DIFFERENCES ON BASE AGREEMENTS, GOP DESIRE FOR CLARIFICATION OF US COMMITMENT UNDER MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY AGREEMENT, ETC., ARE ESSENTIALLY BILATERAL ISSUES AND WILL BE RESOLVED THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN GOP AND USG. WE DOUBT GOP WILL SERIOUSLY ATTEMPT TO PLAY "SOVIET CARD" TO INCREASE LEVERAGE VIS-A-VIS USG. ENTIRE NATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF PHILIPPINES ARGUES AGAINST SUBH A DEVELOPMENT. EQUALLY IMPORTANT, PHILIPPINE RELATIONS WITH PRC AND ASEAN, PARTICULARLY INDONESIA, WOULD ARGUE AGAINST SUCH A COURSE OF ACTION.

(6) ROLE JAPAN WILL PALLY--BEACUSE OF ITS DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE US, GOP HAS NOT SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED JAPANESE REGIONAL DEFENSE ROLE. GOP, WHICH IS CURRENTLY RENEGOTIATING ITS TRADE AGREEMENT WITH JAPAN, VIEWS JAPAN (ITS PRINCIPAL TRADING PARTNER) PRIMARILY AS ECONOMIC ENTITY. JAPAN IS INCLUDED IN MARCOS' "QUADRILATERAL POWER BALANCE," BUT PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF ITS ECONOMIC POWERS. GIVEN EXPERIENCE WITH JAPANESE DURING WWII, GOP (TO EXTENT IT HAS CONSIDERED QUESTION AT ALL) IS PROBABLY UNENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT HEIGHTENED SECURITY ROLE FOR JAPAN OR JAPANESE REARMAMENT.

(7) NATIONAL VULNERABILITIES--INTERNALLY (ASIDE FROM ECONOMIC STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT), GOP'S PRINCIPAL CONCERNS ARE MUSLIM INSURGENCY IN

MINDANAO AND MAOIST NPA EFFORT IN NORTHEASTERN LUZON
AND PARTS OF THE VISAYAS. LOCAL MOSCOW LEANING
COMMUNIST PARTY (PKP) IS IN GOVERNMENT'S POCKET.
MARCOS HAS SOVIET COMMITMENT (FOR WHATEVER IT'S WORTH)
NOT TO MEDDLE IN PHILIPPINE INTERNAL AFFAIRS. DURING
MOSCOW VISIT, SOVIETS REPORTEDLY PROMISED MARCOS TO
ASK LIBYA TO DESIST FROM FURNISHING ARMS TO MNLF AND
STATED FUTURE SHIPMENTS TO LIBYA WOULD BE SUBJECT TO
CONDITION THAT THEY COULD ONLY BE RESHIPED TO OTHER
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ARAB COUNTRIES. GOP VULNERABILITIES IN SPRATLY AREA
ADDRESSED ABOVE.

(8) SIZE AND SHPE OF NATIONAL MILITARY FORCES--
AFP HAS BEEN INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY DURING MARTIAL LAW
BUT PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF MUSLIM INSURGENCY AND MARCOS'
DESIRE FOR INSTRUMENT TO SUPPORT HIS CONTINUED STAY IN
POWER. EXTERNAL DEFENSE CONSIDERATIONS HAVE PLAYED NO
PART IN ITS GROWTH OR COMPOSITION.
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